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# The Spirituality of Q

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The term spirituality is notoriously difficult to define, as is evidenced by the discussions between contemporary sociologists of religion. If there are any central elements to such a definition, they revolve around the search for the sacred, and the view that certain practices or beliefs lead to humans being placed in a position of privileged access to the transcendent dimension. Often such spiritual experiences and insights are the result of practices that seek deeper communication with the divine, or stem from contemplative reflection upon one's purpose in a broader context of universal ontology. This discussion seeks to probe Q for its understanding of spirituality, both in terms of the way the text promotes communication with the divine, as well as offering heightened spiritual experience for adherents to its teaching. In essence, this is an exploration of the way the new religious movement reflected in Q offered its followers contact with the transcendent within the context of everyday human life.

## Introduction

Approaching the Q document using the abstract and etic term 'spirituality' may evoke concerns of anachronism. It is indeed true that the term 'spirituality' or semantically equivalent Greek terms are not to be found in the reconstructed Q document. In fact, perhaps the closest related conceptual term in the New Testament is πνευματικός, which does not denote the abstract idea of 'spirituality', but is an adjectival descriptor that portrays people or objects as being 'spiritual'. It is primarily a Pauline term, occurring 25 times in the Pauline corpus,<sup>1</sup> and twice in 1 Peter and once in Revelation.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that the closest related term does not occur in gospel literature, applying the modern idea of spirituality to an ancient text such as Q can cast into sharper relief some aspects of that text which might otherwise be overlooked. Admittedly, caution is required to ensure that the text is not pressed into modern categories that are foreign to it.

In the discourse surrounding the study of religion, 'spirituality' has become a common way of referring to the experience of the divine either within a religious movement, or to denote the sense of the transcendent outside of formal religious settings. Whilst this may encapsulate part of the broad sense of the term, an agreed or accurate definition is notoriously difficult. One of the attractions of new religious movements is that they promise fresh experiences of the divine, and are often seen by adherents as repristinating institutional religions, especially when the sense of direct contact with the transcendent has been domesticated by formal mediation. Such newfound religious commitment can rekindle the sense of spiritual vitality and the experience of the immediacy of the transcendent. As part of the earliest literary strata of the nascent Jesus movement, the Q document is a textual product of such a new religious movement. It is therefore interesting to explore the document's strategy in addressing its readers to comprehend the manner in which it offers authentic contact with the divine, perhaps with the concomitant critique of existing religious institutions. Therefore, in this discussion a broad definition of spirituality will be adopted in line with the approach of most sociologists of religion. Hence, the spirituality of the Q document will be determined through its insights into experiencing contact with the transcendent or divine, and by probing the claim of more immediate religious experience.

It is necessary to return to the definitional issue to gain more traction on what is being investigated. As has been noted, the definition of 'spirituality' is notoriously contested and has been understood differently within various religious or non-religious settings. A general definition is

1. The adjective occurs in the Pauline corpus at Romans 1.11, 7.14, 15.27; 1 Corinthians 2.13 (twice), 14, 15, 3.1, 9.11, 10.3, 4 (twice), 12.1, 14.1, 37, 15.44 (twice), 46 (twice); Galatians 6.1; Ephesians 1.3, 5.19, 6.12; Colossians 1.9, 3.16.

2. 1 Peter 2.5 (twice) and Revelation 11.8.



open-ended, with the following being representative of the broad contours of what is typically understood by the term spirituality:

[...] a transcendent dimension within human experience. This dimension is discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context. (Shfranske & Gorsuch 1984:231)

Within the broad framework of Christian understanding, it is widely held 'that the study of spirituality appropriately involves a focus on "experience." Although there is no final consensus on what "experience" means or how it can best be studied' (Holder 2007:2). However, most modern approaches to Christian spirituality have noted that the object of study is not simply a series of discrete or ecstatic events, but an ongoing existential phenomenon. Consequently, recent definitions have tended to emphasise the continuous nature of the experience under examination. Thus, Schneiders suggests that:

Spirituality is the actualization of the basic human capacity for transcendence [...] the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence towards the horizon of ultimate value one perceives. (Schneiders 2007:16)

In the discussion that follows, spirituality and the concept of religious experience will be understood broadly. Thus, the purpose of the discussion is to understand the perceived experiential benefits that enabled those believers in Jesus familiar with the teaching enshrined in Q to maintain their religious commitment in the face of real or perceived ostracism, alienation, and persecution from wider society.

## Q texts that illuminate the theme of spirituality

The theme of spirituality or religious experience is nowhere discussed in Q. Instead it is necessary to examine the material contained in the text to uncover what it was that enabled Q disciples to maintain their commitment to this new and liminal religious movement. That commitment stood in the face of persecution and ostracism (Q 6.22–6.23), whether perceived or real. Given that opposition, there must have been strong benefits, which Q disciples perceived to outweigh the hostility and alienation that was directed at them from members of the larger Jewish religious movement that did not accept the message of Jesus (Cromhout 2007:304–306).<sup>3</sup> By probing individual texts, it is hoped to identify positive aspects of the religious commitment to the teachings of Jesus. After these benefits have been identified, the discussion will seek to identify any common themes that might stand at the core of the spirituality or religious experiences that the Q document offers to those who adhere to its teachings.

3. On the tension that existed between the Q disciples and their Jewish co-ethnics, see Cromhout (2007:304–306).

## The promise of the spirit in John's preaching (Q 3.16b)

Within the reconstructed text of the Q document<sup>4</sup> the first promise of encountering the divine occurs in the preaching of John the Baptist. The Baptist pronounces the arrival of the 'coming one', and announces that this figure 'will baptize you in the holy spirit and fire' (Q 3.16b). The images of baptism and fire speak of purification, especially to an audience familiar with Jewish practices of lustrations for ritual purity, and burnt offerings to atone for sins. As Valantasis (2005:48) observes, '[t]he person and the community must be made sacred by purification [...] the wind/fire/spirit baptism indicates an incremental but complete transformation'. However, the purificatory rite is no longer institutionally administered, but is achieved through direct contact with the Holy Spirit. Within the Hebrew Bible, the spirit comes upon, or is poured out on those uniquely designated to speak or act for the Lord (i.e. Jdg 13.25; Is 11.2; Ezk 11.5). Here a democratisation of the experience of direct contact with the divine is promised for those who undergo the baptism of the coming one (Foster 2008:81–91).<sup>5</sup> At this stage in the timeframe of Q, this promise of encounter with the divine lies in the eschatological future, with the coming one bringing the Holy Spirit, which is the agent of God's eschatological salvation.

## The Q beatitudes (Q 6.20–6.23)

Possession of the kingdom of God is promised to the poor. This existential reversal envisages the dispossessed of this world becoming central figures in the kingly reign of God. Although some have understood the statement 'the kingdom of God is yours' to be a proleptic present (Davies & Allison 1998:445–447), it is better understood as reflecting the realised eschatology of Q (Fleddermann 2005:324). God's kingdom is mentioned 13 times elsewhere in Q (Q 7.28; 10.9; 11.2b, 20, 52; 12.31; 13.18, 20, 29; 16.16; 17.20, 21 [twice]). There is a tension between future and realised aspects of the kingdom. In the Lord's Prayer that calls for the kingdom of God to come has a clear future orientation, but even here, it is a future that that can be inaugurated through the prayers of the faithful. By contrast, the present perspective on the presence of the kingdom is seen through Jesus' work as an exorcist: 'but if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Q 11.20). In both that context and here in Q 6.20 God's reign is something that breaks into the present reality of followers of Jesus, because he heralds in the eschatological power of God.

It is often noted that in the reconstructed sequence of Q, the first beatitude follows the final temptation (Q 4.5–4.8) where the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. In contrast to this temptation to possess earthly dominion and authority, Jesus promises the poor that their liminal

4. There are various attempts to reconstruct the text of Q. For the purpose of this article, several reconstructions will be consulted. Priority will be given to Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenborg (2000). Alongside this edition, this study will consult the reconstructed text in Fleddermann (2005) and Neirynck (2001).

5. For a discussion of the role of the coming one in Q, see Foster (2008:81–91).



status already means that they have a place in the heavenly kingdom. Thus, there is an inversion between material experience and spiritual status, thus privileging the socially marginal.

### Love of enemies (Q 6.27–6.28, 35c–35d)

Alongside poverty, suffering is promised as being the route that leads to a familial relationship with God. Q believers are exhorted to ‘pray for those who persecute you, that you may become sons of your father’ (Q 6.28, 6.35c). The experience of the divine is expressed in terms of relationship. This suggests a permanence of the spiritual dimension that is promised in the Q document, which is not a transitory or ephemeral encounter with the deity. Love of enemies (Q 6.27) and praying for persecutors (6.28) are actions that are best understood as emulating the behaviour of God (Nolland 1989:300).<sup>6</sup> Hence, followers of Jesus demonstrate their filial relationship with God by replicating the same behaviour as the deity. Through acting like God, they are drawn into relationship with him as his children. It is in this manner, as God’s children, that Q believers are seen as having an intimate experience of the transcendent.

### God’s revelation to children (Q 10.21–10.24)

Jesus’ thanksgiving to the ‘Father, Lord of heaven and earth’ in Q 10.21 centres upon the belief that God has kept hidden certain things from those who are viewed as being wise, and instead he has disclosed these hidden things to those described as ‘children’ (Q 10.21). Contact with the divine is not purely a sensory experience of followers of Jesus; it is also a pedagogical phenomenon whereby such disciples receive revelation that is withheld from those who are not privileged as recipients of divinely disclosed information.

This Q speech continues by explaining that in order to become a recipient of divine revelation, one must have the father made known through the son. In a sequential series of revelatory acts, it is declared that the father alone knows the son, and in a reciprocal manner, the son alone knows the father. What might be an impenetrable circle of knowledge of the divine is broken open, since in the final clause this knowledge of the father is not limited exclusively to the son (Nolland 1993:575).<sup>7</sup> Rather it is extended ‘to whomever the son chooses to reveal him’ (Q 10.22). Thus as Fleddermann (2005:448) observes, ‘[t]he first speech emphasizes the Father’s desire to communicate his revelation to small children (v. 21d) and the Son’s desire to reveal the Father (v. 22d).’ Therefore, this statement in Q reflects the divine desire for revelation to humanity, as well as explaining the chosen

method – disclosure through the son who has privileged knowledge of the father.

The experience of the transcendent is further portrayed in this section through the statement made in the following makarism: ‘blessed are the eyes that see what you see’ (Q 10.23). Here the eyes of believers are blessed because they have seen the revelation of God described in the previous two verses. The act of seeing has a double function in this context. It refers both to the viewing of Jesus’ signs and miracles, but at a deeper level it describes the spiritual perception of Q believers who have the insight to apprehend the significance of such signs. Hence, the miracles of Jesus, according to Q, constitute the locus for revelation if they are understood as revealing Jesus as the son who can make the father known, and at the same time, they function to draw those with such perception into a filial relationship with God. Therefore, Q’s spirituality is centred upon discerning the status of Jesus, and acknowledging him to be the medium through whom the father is known.

### Answer to prayer (Q 11.9–11.13)

Prayer is a significant theme in Q. Having given the example of the Lord’s Prayer, Q immediately follows this model prayer with a basic theology of the role of intercession in the life of believers. In describing divine response to petitionary prayer, the Q saying makes a comparative argument. The reasoning is that if earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, then ‘how much more will the father from heaven give good things to those who ask him’ (Q 11.9). This is a type of the Jewish *qal wahomer* argument that reasons from the lesser case to the greater by using the precedent established from the generally accepted lesser example. Therefore, access to God and trust in the responsive provision of his fatherly generosity are key to Q’s understanding of the spiritual blessings that its religionists will receive.

Once again, the perspective of Q is that those who enjoy a special familial type relationship with God as children of the heavenly father receive the privilege of divine response to prayer (Davies & Allison 1998:684). These verses also reflect the centrality of prayer in the spiritual life promoted by Q. No doubt, the role of prayer in religious life was not an innovation on the part of the author of Q or even of Jesus as he is characterised in that document. Instead, it was part of wider Jewish spirituality. Nevertheless, the intimacy of prayer language is characteristic of the early Jesus movement, with God portrayed as the archetypal paternal figure who delights in providing for his offspring (Fleddermann 2005:473, n. 252).<sup>8</sup> In this way, a spiritual kinship is established between the believers addressed in Q and a divine figure, which becomes immanent rather than transcendent. It is this access to God, and the sense that the deity is approachable that stands at the heart of the spirituality of Q, and illustrates one of the benefits that adherents to this movement felt

6. Nolland (1989:300) comes to a similar comment in relation to the function of this material in its Lukan setting; he states that ‘[t]o be a son of God here is not the verdict of the future judgment. It is rather the present manifestation in the believer through love of enemy of a nobility like that of love of God who is kind even to the ungrateful’.

7. As Nolland (1993:575) expresses the relationship as follows: ‘[t]he mutual knowledge is not the goal of the present saying, but only forms the basis for the final clause of the verse where the real intention becomes clear. If initially others are left outside the intimacy of this mutual knowing, it is only to be finally, at the Son’s initiative and discretion, invited to share in a knowledge of God as Father, through Jesus’ proclamation and preliminary enactment of the kingdom of God’.

8. As Fleddermann (2005:473, n. 252) observes, ‘father’ and ‘son’ language is prominent in the second major section of Q material (Q 9.57–11.13), with son language in all four pericopae of the section and the term father occurring in three.





that they enjoyed. Valantasis suggests that what is outlined here corresponded to contemporary cultural models of the household, but that this has been spiritualised into a theological portrayal of the new divine family relationship. Thus he states, '[t]he community of followers have become God's family, and the paterfamilias of the family God, will provide appropriate and good responses to God's children's requests' (Valantasis 2005:123).

### More precious than sparrows (Q 12.6–12.7)

A new sense of worth is instilled in believers through the proclamation in Q that the God who cares even about the life of a seemingly insignificant sparrow lavishes far more concern on those who are addressed here in Q. The promise of Q 12.7 is twofold. First believers are assured that even the hairs of their head are numbered, and secondly that God cares for them to a far greater extent than sparrows: 'but even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows' (Q 12.7). This saying follows from the stark statement about fear. Adherents to the Jesus movement are told not to be fearful of those opponents who are perceived to have the ability to destroy earthly bodies (Q 12.4): rather, they are to fear God who has power over both the body and the soul (Q 12.5). The positive side of this perspective is not fear of God, but the more gentle aspect of his relationship with faithful believers. The followers of Jesus are reassured of the care of God for all who remain steadfast in their discipleship with the touching words concerning their worth in the sight of God and the portrayal of his deep care (Q 12.7).

### Lives free from anxiety (Q 12.22b–12.31)

The same theme as the saying on sparrows is found in this complex of sayings that use the ornithological example of ravens and the botanical example of lilies. The emphasis is on living lives free from anxiety in the sure knowledge that the father knows the needs of believers and responds by providing for those needs (Q 12.30). The striking comparison with the beauty of the lilies climaxes with the promise to believers concerning God's care: 'will he not much more clothe you, people of little faith' (Q 12.28). These examples from creation reveal an active and sustaining deity who is engaged in provision. From this, believers are expected to draw lessons pertinent to their own security knowing that God likewise will provide for them. Given this certainty, disciples are called upon to direct their attention elsewhere, rather than to have concern for earthly sustenance and provision. Therefore, according to Q the appropriate focus for believers is to 'seek his kingdom' then consequently, 'all these things will be added to you' (Q 12.31). The series of exhortations that have counselled disciples to trust that God will respond to prayer (Q 11.13), to know one's value is greater than that of the sparrows for whom God cares (Q 12.6–12.7), and to learn from nature to live anxiety-free lives (Q 12.22b–12.30) concludes by refocusing attention on the kingdom, rather than on the self (Fleddermann 2005:615–616). Responding to the demands of God's kingdom not only helps believers to

desist from worry, but by doing this they are also reassured that their human needs will be divinely met. Thus, in terms of the spirituality of Q there is a clear belief that religious devotion and commitment to God will not detract from the provision of human needs. Here the author of Q sets up a hierarchy of attachments: 'Attachment to the God of heaven manifests itself in an absence of attachment to the things of earth' (Bock 1996:1168). Therefore, the spiritual agenda of Q requires a shift of focus away from one's needs, and instead requires contemplation of God's purposes.

### Reclining in the Kingdom (Q 13.29, 13.28)

Whilst Q presents many benefits for believers in the present life in terms of their spiritual experience of the divine, it is not devoid of future hope. That future hope is primarily focused on an even closer communion and relationship with God than that which disciples experience in their present lives. That Q has a future eschatology cannot be doubted given the apocalyptic motifs especially in Q 17.22–17.37, and Q 12.39–12.46. The so-called apocalyptic discourse of Q 17.22–17.37 focuses on the coming day of the Son of Man, which is viewed as a time of apocalyptic judgement. If one can construct an eschatological chronology in Q, then the double saying of Q 13.29, 13.28 reflects a period after the coming of the Son of Man when the faithful have been gathered into the kingdom, but those who assumed they had a privileged position are cast out to a place of 'outer darkness'. As Tuckett (1996:400) notes, this material functions, as 'one of the warnings to Israel with accompanying threats that Gentiles will replace Jews in the kingdom'.

As it is typically reconstructed, following the Matthean ordering of the two elements in this double saying, the promise of partaking in the eschatological kingdom precedes the warning of exclusion:<sup>9</sup>

*[And many] will come from the east and west and recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, but [you will be] cast [into the] out[er darkness], where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. (Q 13.29, 13.28)<sup>10</sup>*

In Q, this saying is followed by a judgement oracle on Jerusalem, which speaks both of the rejection of the prophets and announces the desolation of the temple: 'behold, your house is forsaken' (Q 13.34–13.35). Therefore, Q comments on institutional religion, which it portrays as unable to respond positively to the prophetic messengers sent by God. In its stead Q offers a spirituality that envisages a closer relationship with the divine both in the present life, and in the eschatological age. It portrays an eschatological banquet in which all the nations may participate. Fleddermann also sees the warning of exclusion as directed against followers of Jesus whose discipleship is viewed as deficient. He bases his opinion on the observation that this final section of Q

9. The Matthean parallel is found in Matthew 8.11–8.12. Luz (2001:9) states, 'Matthew probably has taken over this logion from Q somewhat literally. In my judgment the Matthean form, with its neat parallelism that contrasts with Luke 13:28–29 where the logion has been adapted to its context, is primary'.

10. Cf. Robinson *et al.* (2000:416).



commences with the following exhortation to believers: ‘enter through the narrow door, because many will seek to enter through it and few will find it’ (Q 13.24). Thus, according to Fleddermann (2005:699), those excluded will ‘include both the unbelieving Jews whom the gentiles displace and the lawless Christians who find themselves outside the closed door’.

Whilst Q does contain a strong negative warning of exclusion, it is also coupled with the stronger idea of inclusion in the kingdom. This participation in the reign of God is part of the spirituality of Q, while the present experience of the transcendent will only find full expression in the future eschatological banquet when Q believers enjoy the presence of God with the patriarchs. Here the author of Q takes the Jewish trope of an eschatological banquet,<sup>11</sup> and universalises it to extend the possibility of salvation to all who respond to the message of Jesus. As Carroll (2012:291) notes, what is promised here is emblematic of a two-dimensional reversal. The disciples of Jesus on the horizontal plane are linked with the patriarchs as the people of God, thereby displacing those who assumed they held this privileged position (cf. Q 3.8), and in terms of the vertical dimension, believers are the ones who enjoy communion with God in his kingdom (Carroll 2012:291). Therefore, the future eschatology of Q is another aspect to the form of spirituality offered to religionists. Whilst they are already classed children of God through their present life of discipleship, the future hope opens up the promise of an era of even greater contact with the deity. Using the image of the eschatological banquet, Q believers will be partakers in God’s heavenly kingdom and will enjoy similar status to that of the great foundational patriarchal figures.

### The humble exalted (Q 14.11)

Aligned with Q’s wider perspectives on reversal generally, and more specifically with the form of category inversions stated in the beatitudes (Q 6.20–6.21), this saying presents a double inversion: ‘everyone exalting himself will be humbled, and the one humbling himself will be exalted’ (Q 14.11). It needs to be acknowledged from the outset that not all scholars include this saying in Q, instead preferring to view it as a free-floating saying that has come to both Matthew and Luke independently via oral transmission (Vassiliades 1978:68). However, others see it as part of Q since there is a high degree of verbatim agreement between the Matthean and Lukan forms of the saying, and thematically it continues the emphasis in this block of Q on reversal in the eschatological age (Fleddermann 2005:699; Kloppenborg 2000:100). Because not all are agreed that this saying constitutes part of Q, not much weight will be placed upon it.

In fact, the saying reinforces perspectives on the spirituality of Q seen elsewhere in the document, rather than offering any innovative or fresh perspectives. Whilst a generalised principle is enshrined in this saying, in its Q setting the

saying addresses a liminal group of new believers suffering ostracism for their choice to align themselves with a minority religious movement (cf. Q 6.22). The payoff that is announced is that in the divine economy such discipleship from those considered humble and of no account in earthly terms is reversed. The saying concludes with the future passive form of the verb: ὑποθήσεται (Q 14.11b). This is best understood as a divine passive. Therefore, God is the implied active agent, who in response to the self-abasing discipleship of believers reverses their status and raises them to a lofty or exalted position.

The positive benefit for believers announced in the second half of the saying is balanced by the negative consequence for those who are accused of self-exaltation. Again, a divine passive is used to portray their reversal of status. The vainglorious, so Q believers are informed, will in the future be humiliated: ταπεινωθήσεται (Q 14.11b). Once again, there is an eschatological dimension within the spirituality of Q, with true status being bestowed on people by God at a point in time yet to come. Thus, disciples are assured that present standing is not the ultimate reality. Hence the religious outlook of Q would have resonated with the dispossessed and lowly, since it promises redress for those who do not benefit materially in the contemporary circumstance. This is the same concept that is announced in the Q beatitudes: the poor possess the kingdom, the hungry will be filled, and those who mourn will be consoled (Q 6.20–6.21). Whilst the first of these beatitudes is framed as a present reality, the others have a strong eschatological orientation. As Tuckett (1996:141) states, ‘the beatitudes as a whole are all eschatological oriented’. Specifically he notes in relation to the beatitude on persecution that ‘those who are at present being “persecuted” in some way are promised in the final beatitude (Q 6:22f.) a reward and reversal of their present suffering in an eschatological future’ (Tuckett 1996:141–142). Regardless of whether this persecution was more perceived than real, adherents to the teaching announced in Q viewed their own status as one of marginalisation in comparison to the larger society. As a response, the teachings contained in the Q document announced a future reversal. God would elevate those considered as humble and of no account, and consequently their true status would be revealed. Therefore, part of the religious hope of Q is linked to this belief of divine reversal of status for faithful disciples, and the spiritual aspect linked to this is the belief that this entails recognition by and relationship with the divine being.

### Sitting on thrones (Q 22.28, 22.30)

Whilst Matthew presents a form of the saying focused more specifically on the rewards of the Twelve with the specific promise of twelve thrones (Mt 19.28),<sup>12</sup> Luke seems to present an earlier and more generalised form of the saying (Lk 22.28). It is likely that in its Q context the saying was an aspiration addressed to all disciples, rather than narrowly focused upon the Twelve alone. The exact wording of the Q

11. See Isaiah 25.6–25.8, 55.1–55.2, 65.13–65.14; Zephaniah 1.7; 1QSa 2.15–2.22.

12. This also reflects Matthew’s wider tendency to identify reference in his sources to disciples specifically with the Twelve. See Fleddermann (2005:868–869).



saying is difficult to reconstruct, especially as to whether the reference to the kingdom of God formed part of the original saying. Thus, three different reconstructions propose slightly differing wordings of this final Q saying:

You who have followed me will sit [...] on throne[s] judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Robinson *et al.* 2000:560)

You who have [followed] me in the [kingdom] <...> [] will sit [...] on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Neirynck 2001:118–119)

You who have followed me will sit on thrones in the kingdom of God judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Fleddermann 2005:868)

Regardless of whether the Q form of the saying contained any reference to the kingdom, or kingdom of God, or did not mention the kingdom, what remains of the saying informs believers not only of a reversal of fortunes in the eschatological age, but promises an elevated status as judges over Israel.

Hence this final saying in Q does more than promise of reversal of status, it mitigates the present persecution by promising power over the tribes of Israel. There are several possibilities concerning why this judicial role in the eschaton was considered important, and how believers might have contemplated that they would exercise such power. Perhaps this saying was spoken within a context where the Q disciples felt that the power of the leadership in their contemporary 'Israel' was corrupt and directed against their religious allegiance to Jesus (Schürmann 1957:53).<sup>13</sup> Alternatively it might have been seen as a more generalised promise that positions of high prominence would be given to believers in Jesus (Valantasis 2005:223).<sup>14</sup> Perhaps a key element of the Q saying is that in the end-time age disciples will be associated with Jesus in his role as an eschatological judge.<sup>15</sup> The promise of sitting on twelve thrones, at least in Q, is probably less about a new administration and ensuring a continuing leadership role, and more envisaged as an assurance of status in the new era of the kingdom (Bock 1996:1741).<sup>16</sup>

The thrones that are promised to the disciples do not need to be limited to a juridical role, they may also entail a regal perspective thereby combining royal and judicial elements in the future blessing enjoyed by believers. Consequently, Fitzmyer (1985:1415) understands that those to whom this promise is made will be 'not merely charismatic leaders, but regal figures'. In many ways, this final Q saying offers the most elevated promise of future reversal of status to contemporary believers, and within this the vision it implies is for a close association with both the Son of Man in his role as eschatological judge and with God as the kingly figure

13. Schürmann (1957:53) sees the saying as responding to the situation of the persecuted disciples.

14. Valantasis (2005:223) comments that '[f]rom the perspectives of the Jesus movements, however, the ascendancy belonged to them. Their following Jesus entitled them to a throne and to passing sentence upon others'.

15. Q 3.16–3.17, 12.8–12.9, 39–40, 42b–46, 13.24–13.27, 17.34–17.35.

16. In relation to the Lukan formulation of this material, Bock (1996:1741) suggests that the disciples 'will have a continuing role under "new management," in an administration to be revealed in the future but having validity now'.

in the consummation of reign. Thus, disciples are told that that present partial connection with the deity will find full expression in the eschatological age.

## Three major strands in the spirituality of Q

The question of the reason why people became adherents of the Jesus movement in its early phase is difficult to answer, but as an early strand of Jesus tradition, the Q source provides some partial insights. The Jesus movement was a new religious movement and unsurprisingly disciples sought greater religious understanding and heightened religious experience. Those religious experiences can be understood in terms of the spirituality reflected in the Q document: that is the ways in which it promised believers in Jesus a greater degree of contact with the transcendent or with the deity. There seem to be three major areas in which Q claims that members of the early Jesus movement will gain deeper contact with God.

### Filial relationship with God the Father

Firstly, disciples will be drawn into a filial relationship with the deity, and God will be a father to the disciples. This relational language is articulated in a number of different forms in Q. Disciples are placed in closer contact with God through the reception of the Spirit, which is described by the John as a baptism (Q 3.16b). However, the first explicit reference in Q to followers of Jesus being children of God occurs in the context of the command to love one's enemies. Such apparently counter-intuitive action enshrines the ethics of the kingdom and reveals that those who are willing to absorb such violent acts without retaliation are actually 'sons of your father' (Q 6.35c). Whereas the devil challenged the divine sonship of Jesus in the temptation narrative (Q 4.1–4.13), here that title is democratised and transferred to all believers in the teaching contained in the sermon (Fleddermann 2005:330). Less overtly, filial language is used in the saying concerning the father making hidden things known to children (Q 10.21). This is a generalised saying, not addressed to a second person plural group.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the emphasis is clear. God, addressed as 'Father, Lord of heaven and earth', is praised for hiding his revelation from the sages and learned, and instead making it known to children. Here such children are not explicitly identified as disciples. However, given that the following sayings declare that knowledge of the father is disclosed through the son to those to whom Jesus chooses to make such revelation (Q 10.22), and then a beatitude is pronounced addressing a second person plural group stating that their eyes are blessed to see this divine revelation, and this is a privilege that the disciples enjoy in distinction from 'prophets and kings' (Q 10.24), there is little doubt that in the Q context the children mentioned in Q 10.21 are to be understood as disciples.

17. It is possible that this saying originally circulated independently of its Q context, and functioned as a general statement of warning against the wise, and in a broad way spoke of the uneducated as the recipients of Jesus' teaching. However, in its current context in Q it functions to affirm disciples as the privileged recipients of revelation and to declare their status as God's children.





Similarly, Q's teaching on prayer presents disciples as having a special status before God. They are to address him as 'father' (Q 11.2b), and they can be confident that their petitions will be answered since the heavenly father delights to give good things to his children when they ask him (Q 11.13). Therefore, Q assures disciples that the basis for absolute trust in God is his perfect love of them as a father caring for children (Manson 1935:82). This theme is reinforced in the Q's teaching on freedom from anxiety. Disciples are not to be filled with tension about provision of earthly needs because the one who they know as 'father' knows all their needs and will supply what is necessary for earthly life (Q 12.30).

### A life free from anxiety

Secondly, the Q disciples are promised that their lives can be free from anxiety, especially through focusing on the kingdom. The co-ordinated sayings in Q 12.30–12.31 assure believers that their needs are provided by the father, and these teachings counsel the Q religionists to focus on kingdom matters. Again, the example of Jesus in the face of temptation becomes paradigmatic for disciples and they are to emulate his behaviour by seeking the kingdom before earthly sustenance. Fleddermann (2005:615) sees this passage as developing a theme that is central to Q's teaching: 'The initial temptation to turn stones into bread demonstrated Jesus' turning away from humans' tendency to concentrate on their physical needs'.

This teaching is perhaps most fully articulated in the Q beatitudes (Q 6.20–6.23) where the whole ethos focuses upon the certainty of reversal of status, and the certainty believers can have in God's care. There is an eschatological focus to the assurance given to disciples: 'rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great' (Q 6.23a). However, as Betz (1995:582) notes, 'the promise of eschatological joy in the eternal kingdom of God does not exclude anticipated joy here on earth. On the contrary, it is the motivation for such earthly joy'. Hence one of the key spiritual promises to disciples in Q is that existence in this earthly life can be free of care (but not necessarily of persecution) for the kingdom is to be their focus (Q 12.31), and something they possess (Q 6.20b). Moreover, they are assured that material needs will be divinely provided.

### Exaltation in the age to come

Thirdly, in the eschatological age, disciples will enjoy reversal of status, and the climax of change in status will occur with them sitting on thrones in a position of regal and judicial authority judging the tribes of Israel (Q 22.30). Whilst eschatological hope become more pronounced in the final section of Q (Q 13.24–22.30), it is already present in earlier sections of the document such as the beatitudes (Q 6.20–6.23). One of the key spiritual blessings that believers will enjoy is that of taking their place at the eschatological banquet alongside the patriarchs (Q 13.29, 13.28). Here the rhetoric of the saying attempts to shame non-believing Israel with the prospect of gentiles participating in the future kingdom in

place of those who thought they had the right to sit with the patriarchs. Therefore, the prospect is of 'repentant Gentiles – [who] sit down to the Messianic banquet in the Kingdom of God' (Manson 1935:125). Whilst the negative aspect of the saying may be the exclusion of non-believing Israel, the positive hope for disciples is that those who receive the message of the kingdom will be included in the future that God has prepared for the faithful.

The climactic final saying of Q promises not only eschatological reversal, but also the reward of elevation in the presence of God. The promise of Jesus is that disciples will sit on thrones sharing his prerogatives as a royal and judicial figure in God's kingdom.

## Conclusion

The modern category of 'spirituality' explores the sense of the transcendent, or the encounter with the divine that individuals or groups believe they experience. For Q the religious experiences that believers are seen as possessing by adherence to the teaching of the document are understood as corporate blessings often announced in the second person plural, and relate to closer communion with the deity. However, these coreligionists understand themselves as standing in opposition to the parent religion of 1st century institutional Judaism. Not only is the message of Jesus rejected by the majority of pious Jews with whom Q believers interacted (Foster 2013:367–394),<sup>18</sup> but in addition to non-acceptance of this message the Q believers considered themselves to be persecuted or ostracised by the parent religion (Q 6.22–6.23).

Given the rejection of the message of Jesus as presented in Q and the alienation of the minority who accepted the teaching of Q, one may ask what the perceived benefits were that motivated Q disciples to maintain their commitment to the new religious movement. It is suggested here that the ideas of spirituality and religious experience help explain that ongoing commitment. First adherents believed they enjoyed a privileged relationship with God, who they could address as father, and that this was not supplied by the larger parent religious movement to which they stood in opposition. Secondly, even in the face of persecution, disciples hold to the assurance that they have in fact been freed from earthly anxieties and are thereby able to focus on spiritual matters, that is the kingdom (Q 12.31). Lastly, Q believers had a strong sense of an eschatological future in which their status would not only be reversed, but because of their fidelity they would be elevated to prominent roles in God's kingdom. In that future realm they would recline at table with figures of exemplary faith and piety (Q 13.29, 13.28) and they would be installed as those who exercise regal judgement over those seen as their oppressors (Q 22.28, 22.30) (Jacobson 1992:244–248). It was this mix of future hope and present spiritual experiences that enabled the Q disciples to maintain their commitment to the marginal religious movement.

18. On the social location of the Q believers, see Foster (2012:179–201) and Foster (2013:367–394).





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